

Susan Beck: testimony concerning H.B. 6618

The ability to coexist amicably and respectfully with those who hold beliefs that differ from our own is essential to the flourishing of a democracy. But never has this ability been in as short supply as it is today.

The issue of abortion is one of the most divisive in our society. A crucial element in maintaining civility around this issue in Connecticut, where abortion is legal, is respecting the rights of conscience of those who are opposed to abortion. This means that, while all who desire the procedure have legal access to it, those who find abortion antithetical to their system of belief should not ever have to be complicit in it.

If HB 6618 were to become law in this state, the tax dollars of all citizens would be used to fund abortions – making those who oppose abortion complicit in that act against their will and in opposition to their conscience. Passage of the bill would thus demonstrate disregard for the rights of conscience of all citizens who don't believe in abortion.

But even worse, HB 6618 would make abortion the FIRST and ONLY medical procedure for which our state's government would fund travel for people unable to obtain it in their home state. Connecticut does not pay for people to come to Smilow Cancer Hospital to get a cancer treatment they can't get where they currently live, or pay for families to bring a child with a heart malformation to Connecticut Children's for a surgical procedure not available in their home state. So to single out abortion as the ONE procedure the government will help out-of-staters obtain here would do more than just ride roughshod over the conscience rights of those who oppose abortion. It would be "in their face." It would communicate a level of disrespect and antagonism towards those of differing views that would seriously heighten the level of uncivil discourse in our state.

Cancer patients who need financial assistance to travel to and pay for treatments regularly turn to the nonprofit community for this kind of help. And there actually are a number of nonprofits that provide financial assistance to women who cannot obtain an abortion where they live and who want to travel to another state for one.

So if Connecticut citizens who support abortion feel strongly that underprivileged women who must travel for an abortion deserve help, I suggest that they donate to one of these organizations.

Such a nongovernmental approach would accomplish the purpose of HB 6618 but without forcing any Connecticut citizen to go against his or her conscience – and without furthering the uncivil, rancorous atmosphere in our politics and among our citizens generally. Please, let's respect all our citizens' rights of conscience and not pass HB 6618!